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# UNDP Management Training Programme for National Mine-Action Managers

The current training programmes for National Mine Action Managers are examined to determine the advantages of the courses as well as areas in which the programmes can be improved.

by Charles Downs [ Downs Consulting ]



Senior Managers Course participants enjoyed a metal-detector demonstration at Ft. Belvoir while studying at James Madison University.  
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From 2000 to 2006, 10 Senior Managers and 40 Middle Managers Training Courses were conducted for national staff of mine-action programmes from 42 countries. More than 800 managers (including nearly 200 senior managers and over 600 middle managers) completed these courses initiated by the United Nations Development Programme. The courses were designed on the basis of a 1999 UNDP-United Nations Mine Action Service's Training Needs Assessment<sup>1</sup> conducted in response to a 1997 United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs study<sup>2</sup> on the "Development of Indigenous Mine Action Capacity," which concluded that the absence of management skills was a major obstacle to national ownership of mine-action programmes. At the end of 2006, the UNDP's Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery sought to assess the impact of this training on national

mine-action programmes in order to provide a solid basis for further decisions regarding future management training.

In December 2006, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining agreed to conduct a review of the courses and their impact, with the final report to be completed by the end of January 2007. Within this short timeframe, GICHD collected and analysed extensive information about the course providers, course participants, their supervisors and others. It was, however, not possible to conduct country visits to assess the impact on the effectiveness of the national programme from the perspective of key external stakeholders.<sup>3</sup>

The GICHD study team (led by the author)<sup>4</sup> established a work plan to collect and analyse relevant information, including interviews with the UNDP and background documents; site visits to the two prime





Senior Managers Course participants work diligently during their five-week training at JMU.

delivery partners (Cranfield University and James Madison University) for interviews and additional background documents; a visit to the final week of one Middle Managers Course held in Amman, Jordan, in December 2006; preparation and issuance of survey questionnaires to past course graduates, National Programme Directors and Chief Technical Advisors; follow-up interviews with selected graduates; and interviews with other knowledgeable U.N. agency staff.

The study team reviewed the final reports from all 10 Senior Managers Courses, as well as the reports from over a dozen Middle Managers Courses, with particular attention to subjects covered, allocation of time to subjects, use of guest lecturers and participant evaluations. The report did not review the detailed content of individual class sessions, although it did pay close attention to graduate comments on specific subjects.

Though the graduate survey was prepared in English, it was translated into Arabic, Dari, Khmer, Portuguese and Serbo-Croatian and subsequently sent out in the third week of December. The surveys of NPDs and CTAs were sent out in English at that same time. Unfortunately, the period to complete and return the surveys overlapped with year-end holidays for most respondents, likely reducing the level of return. A total of 184 graduates provided questionnaire responses, representing 27 percent of the total overall, including 54 of the 184 SMC graduates (29 percent) and 130 of the 509 MMC graduates (26 percent) of the attempted contacts.

#### Summary of Training Needs Assessment and Course Design

The initial design of the mine-action management training courses was based on the 1999 Global Training Needs Assessment.<sup>1</sup> The study was directed to assess the management-training needs of national staff, distinguishing among three levels of managers: Executive (National Director), Senior (heads of national departments) and Middle Managers (heads of service delivery units and their sections), to determine the major subject areas in which training was required; to estimate the number of people requiring such training worldwide; and to recommend appropriate organisational options for delivery of the training.

The TNA identified a “strong need for training to develop planning skills, leadership, performance measurement, and control, particularly financial and cost-control skills.”<sup>2</sup> The TNA also strongly urged training begin before the end of 1999. It concluded that the management responsibilities (and thus training) most required by Executive, Senior and Middle Managers were essentially the same for all three levels, although the ways to approach the training material would differ. The study proposed that management training be offered at two levels, combining Executive and Senior under a single “Senior Managers Training” and Middle as “Middle Managers Training.” Based on the survey results, the study authors proposed that management training be based on generic management modules aimed at the appropriate level: organisational theory, management science, equipment procurement

and maintenance, economic and financial principles, human-resources management, planning and forecasting, and logistics management. The study also noted a need for specialist operational training.

In terms of the structure of the Senior Managers Course and Middle Managers Course, the Global TNA study proposed an eight-week programme of management skills organized in five substantive areas plus a sixth element encompassing professional skills:

1. **Forecasting and planning:** Planning, budgeting, risk analysis and Information Management Systems for Mine Action
2. **Coordination:** Negotiation and liaison with other stakeholders
3. **Organisation:** Organisation theory and procurement
4. **Leading:** Recruiting, training, motivating and assessing staff
5. **Controlling:** Quality management and financial controls
6. **Professional skills:** Presentation, time management and computer skills

When the pilot courses were designed, the proposed set of subjects deviated from the survey results in two main areas. First, although the survey respondents identified donor relations and resource mobilisation as needs, the study did not include them for training and provided no explanation for this decision. (This subject has since been recognised as important, particularly in the Senior Managers Course.) Second, although survey respondents did not identify procurement and supply chain management as critical needs, they were included in the training area of the study. At the time, these functions were not included because they were primarily handled by international staff and were only added to the study because procurement and supply chain management were expected to become important with the departure of advisers. (This conclusion was later reconsidered and these subjects were reduced, especially in the Senior Managers Course, as the course participants insisted that what was presented was not relevant to their work.)

The Global TNA sought to estimate the number of people who would be appropriate candidates needing each type of management-training course. Based on the existing 16 national mine-action programmes of various sizes, the study estimated there were between 80 and 175 candidates for the Senior Managers Course (which includes up to 35 Executive Managers) and between 120 and 320 candidates for the Middle Managers Course. Furthermore, as the study authors considered mine-action employment to be desirable and stable with low turnover, they did not anticipate the loss of trained staff nor the need for further general training once the initial round was completed.

The initial design of both the SMC and MMC was for an eight-week course for each, comprised of four two-week modules. In both cases, participants found this design too long and repetitive, and the courses were eventually standardized at five weeks. With experience, the delivery partners adapted and sharpened the courses. Both courses have been through full reviews by the delivery partner. The MMC was thoroughly revised in 2005. Taking into account experience accumulated by Cranfield University, James Madison University conducted a comprehensive review of the SMC in 2004, as it prepared to deliver the course for the first time. The respective reviews considerably strengthened both courses.

#### Key Conclusions of the Review

**Impact of the courses.** Graduates and their National Directors are convinced the courses enabled them to be better managers and strengthen their organisations. The SMCs and MMCs are valuable in improving the general management level of mine-action programmes, in the establishment of a common understanding of mine-action issues, and in creating a common language that makes communication more effective within national organisations and programmes, among national programmes, international donors and other stakeholders, and throughout the mine-action community. Further, it has provided this common language to National Directors so they are less dependent on

international advisers to access the mine-action world. This independence has increased the confidence of National Directors and enhanced their profiles in international fora.

The management training courses have had a significant impact on networking and cooperation among country programmes and with staff in related organisations who do not directly work together. The SMC graduates affirm that the exchange of experience with senior managers of other countries was one of the greatest benefits of the course. Most graduates remained in contact with one another for some time after the course, although this was more often a social contact than work-related. The MMC graduates similarly advise that the contacts and opportunity to work with staff of other units and organisations were equally as useful as the course content or learning about mine action and its international context. This natural indirect benefit of the course experience could be encouraged and supported, perhaps through a Web-based forum for the SMC graduates and periodic in-country gatherings for the MMC graduates.<sup>5</sup>

**Course content and organization.** Both the SMC and MMC are of good quality and managed professionally by the prime delivery partners. Both courses have evolved over time, reflecting feedback from course graduates and experience gained by the course coordinators and instructors to improve organisation, substance, delivery and logistics. Both courses are strong but can be further strengthened. Graduates identified the need for more training in areas of applied management, including financial and human resources management, project management and quality management. Many also requested a more intensive immersion in mine-action issues, cases and exercises.

Increasing interest by United Nations agencies and international stakeholders to present to the Senior Managers Course has reduced the time available for core management subjects. On the other hand, the MMCs have very few mine-action guest speakers, and graduates identified this as a weakness of the course.

The UNDP originated the management training material in 2000–2001, but today it is one of several stakeholders in management training for mine action. The UNDP is virtually the sole sponsor for the SMC, but it is a minority client for the Middle Manager Course, providing nine of 10 SMCs, but only 11 of 40 of the MMCs. Both UNMAS and the U.S. Department of State have contracted more courses than UNDP in recent years, acting directly on a country-specific basis.

The management-training effort would benefit from “guidance” and “pedagogic review” mechanisms for the courses. A guidance committee would involve key stakeholders (UNDP, UNMAS, DoS, Department for International Development, donors and representatives from key national programmes) to guide the overall direction of training. A pedagogic committee would involve delivery partners and interested individuals willing to review the substance of the training courses.

**Need for further management training.** More national staff members have taken the SMC than were estimated to be senior managers in the 1999 TNA. The top few senior managers in nearly all U.N.-supported national programmes have taken the SMC, unless their language skills made this impossible. Many participants in recent SMCs do not appear to hold senior-management positions. Additionally, many national managers are now able to attend regular management training in their own countries, have greater formal training and are more experienced than at the time of the TNA. Despite some turnover and the creation of new programmes, it appears that the purpose for the SMC as originally conceived has been fulfilled. Coordinators should base decisions about further SMC courses on a more thorough review of specific needs, including the possibility of adapting the core course for national staff in other types of programmes.

There is an ongoing need for the MMC, but the extent of the need is less clear. The number of graduates from past courses is about double the TNA estimate of total need. The number of programmes has grown



in the meantime. National programmes often state higher numbers of middle managers than the estimate used in the TNA. The need for MMCs should be determined at the level of the respective national programme, through a more specific national TNA developed within the framework of a strategic assessment of the capacity development requirements of the national programme.

Coordinators should design future training efforts within a strategic framework, complementing them with other actions to enhance the performance of the national mine-action programme. Among these facilitating actions should be guidance to international Technical Advisors to effectively support capacity development of national staff.

**Need for more frequent evaluation.** More than six years elapsed between the first of the SMCs and MMCs and the initial overall review of such courses. The delivery partners wrote completion reports with each course or contract and the UNDP submitted completion reports to donors. However, while the desirability of assessing impact was

recognised, an inappropriately long period transpired without evaluation, given that the UNDP spent some US\$1.5 to \$2 million, and others spent double that amount on this UNDP-initiated training programme.

The impact of the manager training should be assessed more regularly at both the global and, more importantly, the national level. This review should include:

- Follow-up on each course to assess its impact and the use of materials (at roughly three and 12 month intervals following the course) to recommend steps within the national programme to make better use of the learning, and to provide feedback regarding possible adjustments to the training.
- Assessment of the impact of training on the performance of the national mine-action programme, especially from the perspective of the stakeholders who are dependent on the services of the mine-action programme. ♦

*See Endnotes, page 112*



**Charles Downs** has worked in mine action since 1999 when he became the Chief of the Mine Action Unit of the United Nations Office for Project Services, a position he held until 2004. Current assignments include Survey Action Center Technical Advisor of the Angola Landmine Impact Survey, improvement of UNDP efforts to strengthen government capacity to manage projects of the Global Fund against AIDS, TB and malaria, advisor to UNDP/Colombia in design of its mine-action strategy and professor of international project management at New York University's Wagner School.

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## News Brief

### Oslo Process Meeting Makes Progress in Banning Cluster Munitions

Representatives from 138 nations and 140 civil societies concluded the third major international conference on cluster munitions in early December 2007, noting that a cluster ban treaty will likely be signed in 2008. The conferees, meeting in Vienna, Austria, reported that important progress was made on issues like victim assistance, clearance, stockpile destruction and international cooperation and assistance.

Members of the civil societies came from more than 50 countries and praised the progress made at the conference. The need for standardized and monitored victim assistance was particularly important to these organizations, which sought consensus on assistance to victims and their families and communities, as well as on obligations to clear contaminated areas and stockpiles. Survivors of cluster munitions accidents also participated in the conference.

The most contentious part of the conference concerned the prohibition and definition of a cluster munition. While some representatives wanted to seek a total ban on all cluster munitions, some countries called for exemptions to certain weapons with self-destruct capabilities and failure rates of a certain percentage. Other countries called for a transition period in which banned weapons still could be used. Despite disagreements over certain parts of a possible treaty, the conference ended optimistically.

The Vienna meeting was preceded by a similar meeting at the end of May 2007, with more than 60 countries meeting in Lima, Peru. The Oslo Process continued in February 2008, and will conclude in Dublin, Ireland, in May. African countries met in March in Uganda to consolidate their position as a region. A treaty signing ceremony in Oslo, Norway, is expected for later in 2008.